

PRESS RELEASE

Congressman John Conyers, Jr.

Fourteenth District, Michigan
Ranking Member, Committee on the Judiciary
Dean, Congressional Black Caucus

FOR RELEASE:
May 5, 2004

CONTACT: Dena Graziano
202-226-6888

CONYERS OPPOSES SATELLITE BILL AMENDMENT THAT WOULD LIMIT MINORITY OWNED STATIONS

In response to today's press conference by Concerned Women for America and other groups in support of the amendment to the satellite reauthorization bill offered and withdrawn by Representative Nathan Deal (R-GA) (which would require cable companies to offer channels on an a la carte basis) Congressman John Conyers, Jr., Ranking Member of the House Judiciary Committee and Dean of the Congressional Black Caucus, issued the following statement:

"It is bizarre that religious conservatives are supporting an amendment that would decimate religious cable stations. This is also an astounding overreach that would silence minority voices and likely run counter to the constitution's most basic protections of free speech. This emergence of 'big government' conservatives, who would preempt private contracts between cable companies and their subscribers, is breathtaking hypocrisy that shows us just how far off the edge of rational thought the current crusade against 'broadcast indecency' has taken them.

Fundamental to the successful of launch and continued viability of cable television stations which seek to represent minority viewpoints, such as channels that promote news and entertainment from an African American perspective or a fundamentalist Christian perspective, is the continued ability to bundle those stations with other stations having broader appeal. Without the ability of these vital community voices to grow an audience and become a self-sustaining channel through the use of bundling, the airwaves will literally be surrendered to the wealthiest media conglomerates representing only majority viewpoints.

Such an approach is also quite likely a violation of basic First Amendment freedoms as articulated by the United States Supreme Court. In a recent case, *United States v. Playboy Entertainment Group* (No. 98-1682 - 2000), the Supreme Court clearly held that where the less intrusive means of "channel blocking" is available to satisfy a government policy concern about broadcast indecency, the government may not impose a more stringent and intrusive means. Here, the cable companies are literally giving away channel blocking devices to allow families to disable any channel they do not wish to view. It is likely unconstitutional and obviously unnecessary for Congress to compel cable companies to do more."